Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 8 August 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16th August 2015: Narsapur. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.15AM.

Spanning an area of over 40 km², the Narsapur Reserve Forest is well known for its bird life. The forest is rich in small woodland birds, woodpeckers and flycatchers. Brown Fish Owl, Indian Pitta, White-bellied Drongo etc are some of the interesting sightings during past visits. Narsapur Lake also has the potential of throwing up some surprises. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr P C Rao, senior scientist with National Geophysical Research Institute. Tuesday, 17th August 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The speaker, Dr P C Rao, is an expert on Earthquakes and Tsunamis, and this is a must-attend lecture, as he will speak on various interesting aspects of the subject.

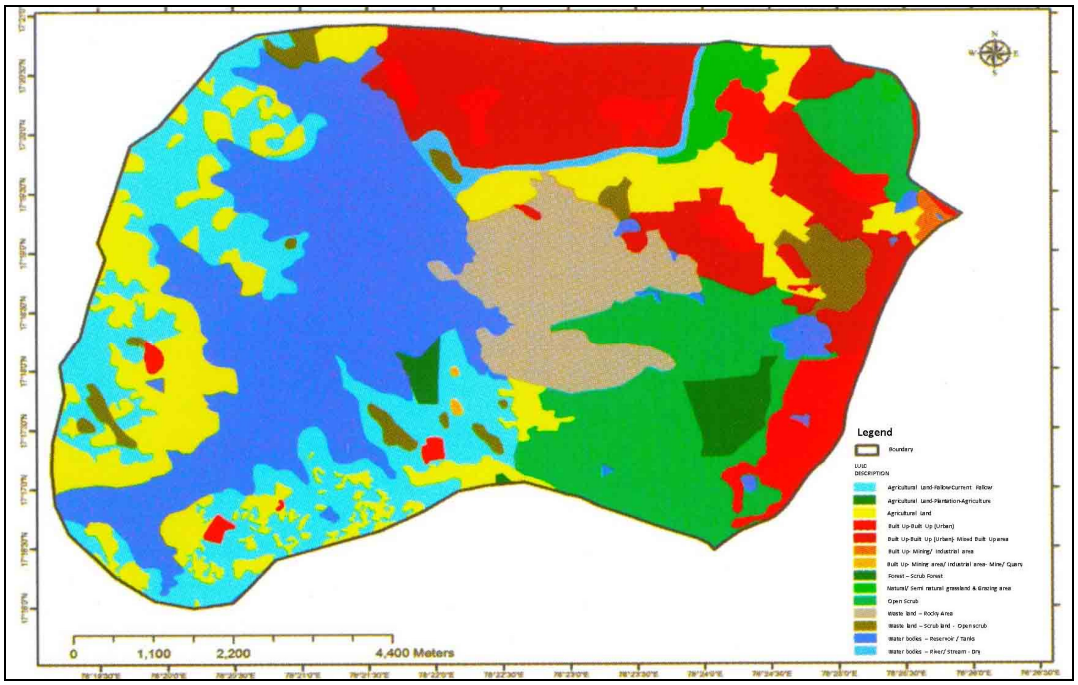
AGRICULTURAL BIRDS OF PROF. JAYASHANKAR TELANGANA STATE AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

Raghu Sravan Kumar & MS Ram

Abstract: A total of 54 species of birds were recorded during the survey, among which predominantly recorded were 14 species of insectivorous birds (26%), followed by 11 species of omnivorous birds (20.3%), 9 species each of frugivorous and grainivorous birds (16.66%). The Order Passeriformes recorded were 21 species, followed by Ciconiformes 5 species, Columbiformes and Cuculiformes with 4 species each. Most of the species recorded were resident breeders (51 sp) followed by local migrants (3 sp). Of the recorded species, predominantly 48 species are common, 5 species are abundant and one species is occasional in occurrence.

Introduction: Agricultural landscapes with the changing seasons, changing scenario and land use patterns, forms a niche for different species of birds. Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, is situated at a distance of 20 Kms away from the main city. The area is a good habitat for many wild animals, birds, reptiles and other common species. According to the information published in the awareness material on "Biodiversity" by All India Network Project on Agricultural Ornithology (AINPAO), at present known as All India Network Project on Vertebrate Pest Management (AINP on VPM), the study area has a floral diversity of 424 species belonging to 252 genera of 64 families, and a total of 412 species of faunal diversity belonging to 43 Orders and 151 families which includes 19 species of Mammals, 172 species of birds, 57 species of Herpetofauna and 164 species of invertebrates (Rao *et al.,* 2013). A similar study carried out by Dr. Ravinder Reddy in 2011 presents a list of 92 species of agriculturally important birds from the cultivation area. An unpublished data collected in a survey conducted by Ram & Sravan, in the month of March, 2014, on account of Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), listed out 27 species of birds during mid-summer. Swamy *et al.,* (2015) have listed 175 species of birds existing and utilizing the surrounding habitats for gathering food, roosting and nesting. In the present study an attempt has been made to record the avifaunal species of the campus and its surrounding environs.

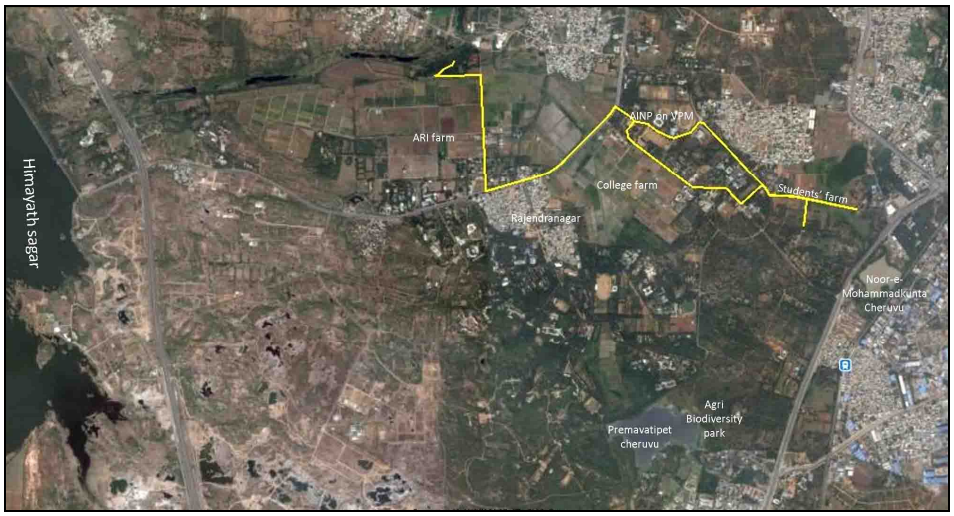
Study area: Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, formerly a part of Acharya N G Ranga Agricultural University is situated at Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, with geographical co-ordinates 78º 19'3.277" N and 17º 21'3.553" E in North-West and 78 º 25' 59.64" N and 17 º 15' 46.748" E in South-East (Map 1). It contains 7890 hectares of diverse habitats such as open scrub, rocky outcrops, mixed forests, wetlands and agricultural landscapes and is undoubtedly one of the major green lung spaces for the urban population of Hyderabad. Land utilization pattern in the university speaks of agricultural land (30.46%) as the most common followed by natural forests (26.10%), water bodies (24.70%) and urban built-up (19.33%). Of the 30.46% of agricultural land, the university has 53 hectares of students' farm and 113.60 hectares of college farm for conducting research in agriculture apart from interspersed with office buildings, Auditorium, Hostels, Health center, farm houses, green houses, staff quarters, Agro forestry plantations, sports complex and patches of barren land comprising an area of 53.50 hectares and a well-established Agri-Biodiversity Park spread over 200 acres.



Map 1. LULC Map showing the Land use land cover pattern of the PJTSAU and surrounding areas

Materials & Methods: With the prior permissions from the University administration, we set to conduct field studies in the campus with a group of 30 members. Having gathered at All India Network Project on Vertebrate Pest Management (Formerly All India Network Project on Agricultural Ornithology) by 6:30 AM with all essential equipment - binoculars and cameras, we started recording bird species that we came across. We covered the entire Students' farm and returned back passing through the landmarks from AINP on VPM – Auditorium - Students' farm - administrative block - Home Science department - NCC Parade ground. We later moved on to Agriculture Research Institute (ARI) campus at Rajendranagar, totally covering a distance of 7 Km (Map 2) from 6:30 AM to 11:30 AM. In this study an attempt was made to record the agriculturally important avifaunal composition at agricultural landscape spread out in 2403 ha area (30.46 %) of the Agricultural University campus, as well the surrounding areas during the early monsoon season for the year.

Results: Avifauna composition of the Agricultural College campus and the ARI farm areas was represented by a total of 54 species belonging to 14 Orders with 32 families. Of the total species, 48 species are common and 5 are abundant in occurrence. Status-wise, 51 species are known as resident breeders, 2 are local migrants and 1as partial migrant. The most abundant species recorded belong to the order Passeriformes (24 Sp), of which 22 species are common in occurrence and 23 species are resident breeders with local migrant, followed by Ciconiformes (5 Sp) of which 3 species are common and 2 species are abundant in occurrence and all the 5 species are resident breeders and the other species comprises from the other orders (Table 2).



Map 2. Google Earth map showing tracks of survey done at PJTSAU campus, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad

Since the survey has been conducted in agricultural habitat, it is necessary to classify the birds according to their foraging guild and also along with their IUCN and IWPA status. A total of 14 insectivorous species, followed by 11 omnivorous, 9 frugivorous and grainivorous each, followed by 4 each under carnivorous and piscivorous, and 2 each under nectorivorous and herbivorous were recorded during the period of survey. All the species are considered as Least Concerned as per IUCN except the Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) which was under Near Threatened category. According to Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972), 3 species are categorized under Schedule-I and remaining all species are under Schedule-IV (Table 1).

Table 1. Systematic list of birds with their status and abundance at the University campus

Order: Family Scientific Name	Common Name	Foraging guild	IUCN status	IWPA status
Anseriformes: Anatidae				
Anas poecilorhyncha (J.R. Forster, 1781)	Spot-billed Duck	Herbivorous	Lc	IV
Dendrocygna javanica (Horsfield, 1821)	Lesser Whistling-Duck	Herbivorous	Lc	I
Apodiformes: Apodidae				
Cypsiurus balasiensis (Gray,JE, 1829)	Asian Palm Swift	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Charadriforms: Charadriidae				
Vanellus indicus (Boddaert, 1783)	Red-wattled Lapwing	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Ciconiiforms: Ardeidae				
Ardea purpurea (Linnaeus, 1766)	Purple Heron	Piscivorous	Lc	IV
Ardeola greyii (F. Boie, 1822)	Indian Pond Heron	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Bubulcus ibis (Linnaeus, 1758)	Cattle Egret	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Threskiornithidae				
Pseudibis papillosa (Temminck, 1824)	Black Ibis	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Threskiornis melanocephalus (Latham, 1790)	Oriental White Ibis	Piscivorous	NT	IV
Columbiformes: Columbidae				
Columba livia (Gmelin, 1789)	Blue Rock Pigeon	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Streptopelia chinensis (Scopoli, 1786)	Spotted Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Streptopelia decaocto (Frivaldszky, 1838)	Eurasian Collared Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Streptopelia senegalensis (Blyth, 1842)	Little Brown Dove	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Coraciformes: Cerylidae				
Ocyceros birostris (Shaw, 1786)	Indian Grey Hornbill	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Halcyonidae				
Halcyon smyrnensis (Linnaeus, 1758)	White-throated Kingfisher	Piscivorous	Lc	IV
Meropidae				
Merops orientalis (Latham, 1801)	Small Green Bee-eater	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Cuculiformes: Cuculidae				
Centropus sinensis (Stephens, 1815)	Greater Coucal	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Clamator jacobinus (Boddaert, 1783)	Pied Crested Cuckoo	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Eudynamys scolopacea (Linnaeus, 1758)	Asian Koel	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Hierococcyx varius (Vahl,1797)	Common Hawk Cuckoo	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Falconiformes: Accipitridae				
Accipiter badius (Gmelin, 1788)	Shikra	Carnivorous	Lc	I
Elanus axillaris (Latham, 1802)	Black-shouldered Kite	Carnivorous	Lc	IV
Milvus migrans (Boddaert, 1783)	Black Kite	Carnivorous	Lc	IV
Galliformes: Phasianidae				
Francolinus pondicerianus (Gmelin, 1789)	Grey Francolin	Grainivorous	Lc	IV

Pavo cristatus (Linnaeus, 1758)	Indian Peafowl	Omnivorous	Lc	I
Gruiformes: Rallidae				
Amaurornis phoenicurus (Pennant, 1769)	White-breasted Waterhen	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Porphyrio porphyria (Linnaeus, 1758)	Purple Swamphen	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Passeriformes: Alaudidae				
Mirafra cantillans (Blyth, 1845)	Singing Bushlark	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Cisticolidae				
Prinia inornata (Sykes, 1832)	Plain Prinia	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Prinia socialis (Sykes, 1832)	Ashy Prinia	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Compephagidae				
Pericrocotus cinnamomeus (Linnaeus, 1766)	Small Minivet	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Corvidae				
Corvus culminatus Sykes, 1832	Jungle Crow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Corvus splendens (Vieillot, 1817)	House Crow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Dendrocitta vagabunda(Latham, 1790)	Rufous Treepie	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Dicaeidae				
Dicaeum erythrorhynchos (Latham, 1790)	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Nectarivorous	Lc	IV
Dicruridae				
Dicrurus macrocercus (Vieillot, 1817)	Black Drongo	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Estrildidae				
Lonchura malabarica (Linnaeus, 1758)	Indian Silverbill	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Lonchura punctulata (Linnaeus, 1758)	Scaly-breasted Munia	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Leiothrichidae				
Dinopium benghalense (Linnaeus, 1758)	Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker)	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Muscicapidae				
Cyornis tickelliae (Blyth, 1843)	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Saxicola caprata (Linnaeus, 1766)	Pied Bushchat	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Saxicola torquatus (Linnaeus, 1766)	Common Stonechat (Siberian Stonechat)	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Saxicoloides fulicatus (Linnaeus, 1776)	Indian Robin	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Nectariniidae				
Nectarinia zeylonica (Linnaeus, 1766)	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Nectarivorous	Lc	IV
Oriolidae				
Oriolus oriolus (Linnaeus, 1758)	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Passeridae				
Passer domesticus (Linnaeus, 1758)	House Sparrow	Omnivorous	Lc	IV
Plocidae				
Ploceus philippinus (Linnaeus, 1766)	Baya Weaver	Grainivorous	Lc	IV
Pycnonotidae				
Pycnonotus cafer (Linnaeus, 1766)	Red-vented Bulbul	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Pycnonotus luteolus (Lesson, 1841)	White-browed Bulbul	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Sturnidae				
Acridotheres tristis (Linnaeus, 1766)	Common Myna	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Timaliidae				
Turdoides affinis (Jerdon, 1845)	Yellow-billed Babbler	Insectivorous	Lc	IV
Megalaimidae				

Megalaima haemacephala (Latham, 1788)	Coppersmith Barbet	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Psittacidae				
Psittacula krameri (Scopoli, 1769)	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Frugivorous	Lc	IV
Strigidae				
Athene brama (Temminck, 1821)	Spotted Owlet	Carnivorous	Lc	IV

IUCN= International Union for Conservation of Nature; Lc =Least concerned; NT= Near threatened; IWPA= Indian Wildlife Protection Act; I& IV - Schedule-I, Schedule-IV

Table 2. Status of birds recorded at Agricultural University Campus, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad

S. No	ORDER	Fa	Gen	Sp	OCCURRENCE			STATUS		
					Com	Abu	Occa	Res	Bre	LM
1	Anseriformes	1	2	2	1	1		2	2	
2	Apodiformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
3	Charadriforms	1	1	1	1			1	1	
4	Ciconiiforms	2	5	5	3	2		5	5	
5	Columbiformes	1	2	4	4			4	4	
6	Coraciformes	3	3	3	3			3	3	
7	Cuculiformes	1	4	4	4			3	3	2
8	Falconiformes	1	3	3	3			3	3	
9	Galliformes	1	2	2	2			2	2	
10	Gruiformes	1	2	2	1	1		1	1	
11	Passeriformes	16	19	24	22	1	1	23	23	1
12	Piciformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
13	Psittaciformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
14	Strigiformes	1	1	1	1			1	1	
Total	**14**	**32**	**47**	**54**	**48**	**5**	**1**	**51**	**51**	**3**

Fa= Family, Gen= Genus, Sp= Species, Com= Common, Abu= Abundant, Occa= Occasional, Res= Resident, Bre= Breeding and LM= Local migrant.

Bird of the day

"Shikra" was the bird of the day, as a juvenile Shikra was mistaken for a Besra. This made us realize the importance of keen observations, which are necessary for correct identification.

Acknowledgement

We are very thankful to the authorities of PJTS Agricultural University for permitting us to conduct the survey. We are also grateful to the Head, AINP on VPM for sparing their staff and being with us throughout the survey.

References

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2. V. Vasudeva Rao, S. J. Rahman, V. Hanumantha Rao, G. Surender, A.V. L. N. R. Rao, A. Baleeshwar Reddy, B. Laxmi Narayana and P. Venkateshwarlu. "Bio-diversity at ANGRAU and Surrounding Environs", *Publicity material- A source of information*. All India Network Project on Agricultural ornithology, ANGRAU, Rajendranagar, Hyd - 30 (Jan, 2013).
3. K. Swamy, A. Baleeshwar Reddy, V. Hanumanth Rao, G. Surender, B. Laxminarayana, R. Sravankumar, B. Naresh and V. Vasudeva Rao. "Bio-diversity at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (Formerly part of Acharya N G Ranga Agricultural University) and surrounding environments", (Abstract published) Natural resources & Animal husbandry - International conference on Bio-resources and Stress management.

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ANTARCTICA
COLDEST DRIEST AND MOST MAGNIFICENT
Report – Indoor Meeting, 7th July 2015

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: P Janardhan Reddy

Antarctica is the earth's southernmost continent containing the geographic South Pole. It is situated in the Antarctic region of the southern hemisphere, almost entirely south of the Antarctic Circle.

The Antarctic is visited by more than 40,000 tourists annually, the most popular destination being the Antarctic Peninsula area, especially the South Shetland and South Georgia Islands.

One such visitor was our speaker, Janardhan Reddy. He kept the audience enthralled with his narration and his wonderful pictures of the cold and beautiful wilderness.

With a surface area of 14 million square kilometers, South Georgia was the first island of the Antarctic discovered by Anthony De La Roche in 1675. The region had no indigenous population when first discovered and its present inhabitants comprise a few thousand transient scientific and other personnel working at the several dozen research stations maintained by various countries.

The Indian Antarctic Program is a multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional program under the control of the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India. It was initiated in 1981 with the first Indian expedition to Antarctica. The program gained global acceptance with India's signing of the Antarctic Treaty and subsequent construction of the Dakshin Gangotri Antarctic Research base in 1983.

Some interesting facts about the Antarctic:

* Nobody owns it. It remains free of government and ownership. In 1959 the Antarctic Treaty was drafted designating the land as “a natural reserve devoted to peace and science”.

* It is the only continent without a time zone.

*Antartica is the coldest place on earth - the coldest temperature ever recorded was an unbelievable -89.6 Degrees Centigrade! - and there is good reason to hope that it remains so, because if global warming would cause its ice sheets to melt, then ocean levels across the world would rise 200 feet!

*There are no permanent residents here.

Coming to the creatures that dare to inhabit this punishing ‘freezer’ environment - these are the Penguins, Whales, Seals, Krill, Albatross, etc. The largest of the penguins, the Emperor Penguin, breeds here.

Janardhan Reddy spoke at length about his fantastic Antarctic experience, and the ensuing discussion threw up a whole lot of questions. It seemed to me that several members of the audience were tempted to make travel plans to the Antarctic!

Some photos from Janardhan Reddy’s trip:

Emperor Penguin & Adelie Penguins

Crab-eater Seal

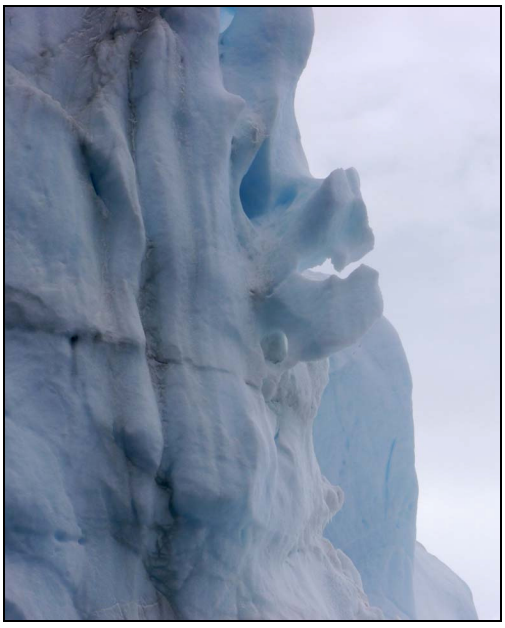
Blue-eyed Shags

Chinstrap Dolphins

Kelp Seagull

Humpback Whale with baby

Ice Form



Ice Form

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Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*)

Bank Myna (near Sattal, 17-04-2015)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Sturnidae
Genus: *Acridotheres*
Species: *A. ginginianus*
Size: 23 cm

Description & distribution: The Bank Myna is a South Asian myna that is smaller than the Common Myna, and has a somewhat similar general colour scheme. The head is black, neck and mantle are slaty grey, and wing coverts are black, while the underparts are lighter grey with some pinkish plumage towards the centre of the abdomen. It has a pink wing patch near the base of the primaries which is not always seen. The tail is black, with the outer tail feathers having pale pinkish-buff tips. Legs are yellow, while the bill and a prominent bare patch behind the eyes are bright orange-red. Irises are deep red. The Bank Myna may also show a tuft of feathers at the base of the upper mandible, reminiscent of the Jungle Myna. The sexes are similar, but younger birds have a browner head and neck.

The Bank Myna is more or less restricted to the Indian sub-continent, being found from the Indus Valley eastwards across the Gangetic plains and south of the lower Himalayan foothills. Of late, more sightings are being reported from southern India, though it was earlier considered to be absent. There are also reports of flocks in Japan, Taiwan and the Maldives, while it is an introduced bird in Kuwait. Generally resident, it may undertake movements in response to changes in weather and food conditions.

Habitat & behaviour: The Bank Myna is gregarious - it forages in flocks, breeds colonially, and roosts in large groups on trees. Usually found near open water, its usual habitat is cultivated farmland and open country, although flocks are often seen in markets, railway stations, gardens and parks inside cities within its range. A very vocal bird, it uses a wide range of calls - croaks, clucks, whistles, screeches and song elements - quite like the Common Myna, although softer. The diet mainly consists of grain, fruit and insects, but it may pick up scraps in road-side restaurants and dumpyards, and is even known to follow catering vehicles in airports. It may also, like the Common Myna, perch on livestock or follow grazing animals to pick up disturbed insects.

Nesting: The Bank Myna breeds from April to August. Its common name has, in fact, originated from its practice of nesting almost exclusively in holes excavated in moist earthen river banks, embankments or walls of open wells, although it may occasionally use holes in brick walls. Excavated holes may be up to 7 feet deep. Nests are lined with grass, leaves, feathers and even snake slough. The usual clutch consists of 4-5 pale sky-blue or greenish-blue eggs, and two broods may be raised in a season.

Local name: The Bank Myna is known as *'ganga myna'* in Hindi and Marathi, *'ganga gutar'* in Punjabi and *'ganga saarika'* in Sanskrit. Vernacular names in South Indian languages don't seem to be well-known, possibly because its range has only recently started expanding southwards.

SIGHTING OF DESERT WHEATEAR IN HYDERABAD

Text and photo: Supreet Sahoo

On a chilly winter morning in Hyderabad, I was preparing for my morning rounds to Ameenpur when I said to myself, "Today will be special". But then again, isn't that what all bird photographers think to themselves before they start their day!

The destination was one of the most popular birding locations of Hyderabad, Ameenpur Lake, but the motive was ambitious - to find and photograph the most uncommon of birds. Perhaps this is what has motivated me to travel distant lands in the past. The quest continues.

As soon as we reached Ameenpur, I started scouring the location for the usual suspects - Pratincoles, Herons, Sandpipers, etc. While I was photographing a Kingfisher, an unusual, petite bird flew across in front of my camera and from the corner of my eye I could tell that this one was different. It was sunny and it took a bit of time to find this bird.

As soon as I saw it I knew that it was different, yet something I had noticed in the past.

A Desert Wheatear! In Hyderabad! How is that even possible? I took down some notes and Googled to learn more about past sightings and found an article by Ashwin Naidu which gave more details about previous sightings.

A happy start to the day, indeed!

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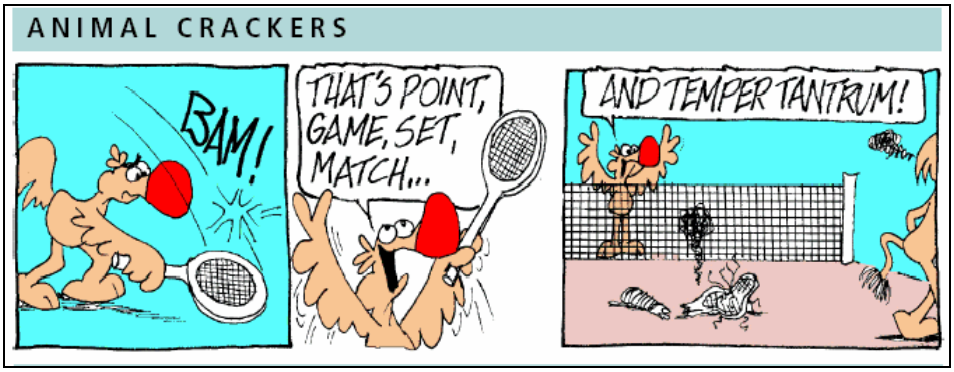
Bird Humour



(From Times of India, 01-05-2014)

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